



LGA/SOLACE response: Ofsted review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

October 2013

Introduction

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government and our mission is to support, promote and improve councils. We work with councils to achieve our shared vision for local government by focusing our efforts where we can have real impact, being bold and ambitious, and supporting councils to make a difference, deliver and be trusted.

SOLACE is the representative body for senior strategic managers working in the public sector in the UK. We are committed to promoting public sector excellence. We provide our members with opportunities for personal and professional development, and seek to influence debate around the future of public services to ensure that policy and legislation are informed by the experience and expertise of our members.

LGA/SOLACE response

Overall, we are disappointed that this consultation document has shown little evidence of taking into account our previous LGA/SOLACE joint response (July 13) on the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, looked after children and care leavers which also included questions on Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) or the opinions and experience of the pilots.

National evidence from Serious Case Reviews suggest that a whole systems approach (good multi agency arrangements) as well as active listening of children and young people and their family are at the heart of more effective safeguarding. If these planned 'Reviews' are the best litmus test of how well agencies are working together in our local areas on these issues, we would urge Ofsted to think again about how robust this consultation document is from an outcomes perspective.

Proposal (I) How Ofsted will undertake a review of the LSCB

We welcome the inclusion of LSCB reviews as a way of assisting local authorities in holding the whole local safeguarding system to account. However, the proposed arrangements fall significantly short of multi-inspectorate arrangements, which the authorities who piloted that approach had found enormously beneficial in terms of

partnership involvement and commitment to partners' key roles in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area, in line with their statutory responsibilities.

We agree that it is right that the judgement of the LSCB will not in itself limit the overall effectiveness judgement of the local authority.

We question whether the single inspection framework alone can address concerns about previous inspection regimes: an over-focus on compliance with process not outcomes; looking at symptoms, instead of causes; a deficit-based approach; and, extent to which it can drive improvement.

Whilst we do not have any specific comments on the logistics of how Ofsted plan to undertake a review of the LSCB, we would again ask Ofsted to consider whether the role of Corporate and Political Leadership beyond Children's Services (namely the Leader and the Chief Executive) are sufficiently clear and embedded in the arrangements proposed. There is no mention in this consultation document of the accountability relationships of the Chair of the LSCB and how these are to be evaluated.

Likewise, we find it disappointing that inspectors will only interview Board partners, 'where possible' – this surely negates one of the key drivers of why such a review may add value.

We would expect that the draft report of the review of the LSCB be sent to the local authority at the same time as the Chair of the LSCB and question if 5 days is adequate time to respond to inaccuracies.

Proposal (II) Undertaking a review of the LSCB

We continue to oppose the introduction of a single overall judgement beyond a simple above/below the line threshold. We feel that greater granularity of judgement is only possible when considering particular aspects of the local system separately, and that a single, graded judgement is an overly simplistic assessment of a complex, multi-faceted set of services and working relationships.

We agree with Ofsted that only good is good enough and welcome this emphasis. However, the actual terminology proposed ("requires improvement") is both inappropriate and unhelpful at a time of immense pressure on all partners in this area. All children's services and the LSCB will need to improve, not just those formerly classified as "adequate". However, we expect that the threshold between 'requires improvement' and 'good' will recognise the generally very high performance of local authority child protection services in international terms – as recently acknowledged at the ADCS Annual Conference by HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw himself.

If a single overarching judgement is adopted then inadequate contributions by particular partners must be clearly acknowledged. This must be made clear to avoid the impression of issues being reflective of other partners or the wider partnership arrangements in an area.

We also question the boundary of the review parameters – e.g. they encompass ‘early help’ which is broader than the LSCB’s current statutory remit and the review approach descriptors do nothing to help confused accountability relationships in this terrain.

We find it disappointing that sector led improvement is not mentioned anywhere in this document. We believe sector led improvement is the best route to sustainable improvement and would ask Ofsted to include a reference.

General points

Many pilots of the single inspection framework said it was a significant ask both in time and resources. At a time when local government and partners are operating under enormous budgetary constraint and undertaking almost continuous service transformation, inspections must be flexible, focused and proportionate to ensure effectiveness and manageability in its deployment. Ofsted must ensure that this opportunity delivers a reduction in overall burdens, so that resources are not unnecessarily diverted from frontline services.

We would strongly urge Ofsted to make a broader, cultural shift toward the role of ‘consumer champion’ with inspections focusing much more closely on the experience and outcomes of children and their families – in particular to make efforts to hear the voice of the children and young people LCSB have been set up to protect. This would tie in with the framework for Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers which this LSCB review accompanies.

Lastly, we retain significant concerns (as did the pilots of the single inspection framework) of the capacity and capability of Ofsted inspectors to deliver such an ambitious programme. We seek, as we did in our July submission, clarification from Ofsted on how these issues will be redressed. We reiterate Professor Munro’s call that it is important for any inspector or reviewer to have sufficient expertise and experience in safeguarding to ‘get behind’ any data used to inform inspection.